

REVIEW

of application documents for the academic position of Associate Professor
at St Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia
by Prof. D.Sc. Vladimir Gradev

Details of the call for applications:

Professional field: 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology, and Culture Sciences (Theory and History of Culture. Research and Communication Culture in the Social Sciences and Humanities)

Public announcement: *Darzhaven Vestnik*, issue 48, 28 June 2022

Position opening requested by the Department of History and Theory of Culture, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sofia

Applicants: Martin Nikolaev Ossikovski

1. General description of the materials submitted

Martin Nikolaev Ossikovski is the sole candidate for the present call for applications in professional field 3.1. Sociology, Anthropology and Culture Sciences (Theory and History of Culture. Research and Communication Culture in the Social Sciences and Humanities).

Martin Ossikovski's application pack fulfils the respective requirements of the University of Sofia and includes the following documents:

1. Curriculum Vitae
2. Higher education diploma plus supplement
3. Doctoral degree diploma
4. Documents verifying the candidate's academic employment history as Assistant Professor, Chief Assistant Professor, and Associate Professor at the University of National and World Economy (Sofia)
5. Employment history certificate verifying the candidate's 11-year experience as at the University of National and World Economy
6. Medical certificate
7. Judicial record certificate
8. List of all publications (a total of 32 entries)

9. List of publications submitted for the current call for applications (a total of 13 entries)
10. Summary of the candidate's fulfilment of the minimum national requirements according to Article 2b of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria
11. Summary of the candidate's citations
12. Summary of the candidate's academic contributions
13. Summary of the candidate's fulfilment of the requirements of Article 112, paragraph 2
14. Publications submitted for the current call
15. Publication abstracts
16. Facsimile of the call announcement in *Darzhaven Vestnik*

There are no omissions in the documentation pack and its supplements. The materials submitted are in full agreement with the requirements of Article 2b of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the additional requirements of St Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia.

2. Biographical background of the candidate

Martin Ossikovski graduated with a BA in Philosophy with distinction in 2002 from the University of Sofia. In 2003 he obtained an MA in Medieval Studies *magna cum laude* from the Central European University in Budapest with a master's thesis titled "The Conciliar Doctrine of Marsilius of Padua. Political Resonances and Theological Connotations". In 2009 he became a Ph.D. in History and Theory of Culture with a doctoral thesis titled "The Council and the Church in the Writings of Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham", which he defended at the University of Sofia.

At the beginning of his professional path, Ossikovski worked at Zlatarski International School, where he taught Theory of Knowledge under the International Baccalaureate Programme (2003-2007). Also, he taught English for several years at the Technical University of Sofia and Britanica Language Centre.

In 2010 Ossikovski applied successfully for a position opening at the University of National and World Economy, where he worked as an Assistant Professor, Chief Assistant Professor and, starting in 2018, Associate Professor. There, he taught academic writing, media ethics, media history, as well as specialised English language courses for journalists and sociologists. In addition, he held several administrative positions at UNWE, such as University Secretary for Web

Communications, which involved responsibilities for the optimisation of UNWE's web infrastructure (website, social profiles, etc.).

Since 2021, Martin Ossikovski has been working as an Associate Professor at the Department of History of New Bulgarian University, where he teaches Europe of Ideas and the Ideas of Europe and Civic Skills and Competences.

Martin Ossikovski has been a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Philosophy of Sofia University for many years, where he has taught various required and elective courses/seminars, such as Political Phenomena of Medieval Europe, History and Theory of Medieval Culture, Everyday Life and Social Groups in the Middle Ages, Academic Writing.

The candidate spent 2007-2008 as a Chevening Scholar at Oriel College, University of Oxford. He has also been a DAAD Guest Researcher at the University of Heidelberg (2007), as well as a visiting lecturer at the University of Helsinki (2005).

The candidate is an active researcher. In this regard, it would suffice to note that he is the coordinator of "Challenges Facing the Future of SSH", a large international project hosted by the Centre for Advanced Study – Sofia (2020-23), as well as the initiator and co-organiser of the first national roundtable on research evaluation policies in Bulgaria (10 May 2019).

Martin Ossikovski is proficient in English, a language in which he teaches and publishes, as well as in German and Russian. For academic purposes, he also uses Latin, Classical Greek, French, Italian, and basic Chinese. His various digital skills allow for his active involvement in website optimisation tasks, management of institutional social profiles, and digital education platforms administration.

3. General description of the candidate's teaching experience and research activities

I will first focus on the candidate's teaching experience and research activities, which I find directly related to the specific field of the current call for applications, i.e. research and communication culture in the social sciences and humanities.

Over the years Martin Ossikovski has offered and taught courses in academic writing multiple times. His academic writing series goes with an electronic pack of study materials, the format of which allows for continuous updates. Previously (in academic year 2006/2007), he has offered this course also at the Department of History and Theory of Culture of the University of Sofia. Also, he has authored university courses in media history and foreign journalism and taught various additional courses at the University of National and World Economy, New Bulgarian University, the University of Sofia, the University of Helsinki, and the University of Lower Silesia.

Martin Ossikovski is coordinating an ambitious international project at the Centre for Advanced Study – Sofia titled “Challenges Facing the Future of the Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH)”, which aims to collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data regarding research evaluation and funding in the field of SSH in 12 European states. Under his supervision, the project’s team members have authored an original methodology to accomplish this task. A separate IT team is currently building the web instrument giving in-depth access to the projects findings. The project has the ambition to lay the foundations of a permanent Sofia-based SSH observatory.

The candidate is also the initiator and co-organiser of the first national roundtable on the research evaluation policies in Bulgaria (“Bulgarian Academia between Quantity and Quality”) and co-author of the first national sociological survey on the topic. The roundtable was organised in response to his earlier publications calling for differentiated approaches to research evaluation in STEM and SSH, which provoked a wide response in academic communities in Bulgaria. Together with Assoc. Prof. Valentina Georgieva (University of Sofia), Ossikovski authored an in-depth sociological survey questionnaire and collected and analysed nearly 400 responses coming from colleagues employed in different sectors of Bulgarian academia. Based on data discussions, roundtable participants agreed on a final document containing recommendations for improvement of Bulgaria’s approach to research evaluation.

My overall evaluation of the candidate’s teaching experience and research activities is very positive. He has integrated innovative and interactive approaches into his teaching and, locally, has actively taken part in the digitalisation of higher education. His research focus over the past few years has moved closer to problems of research evaluation and, more specifically, the potential of differentiated research evaluation approaches. His activities in this regard have reached out to a higher international level, which is well testified by the SSH project mentioned above, and unlocked an important public debate regarding the future facing the social sciences and humanities in general. Both Ossikovski’s teaching achievements and his research activities contribute much to the larger field of research and communication culture in the social sciences and humanities, which is also the focus theme of the current call.

The candidate has submitted thirteen publications for the current call, three books and ten articles, to which I’d like to turn briefly.

His *The Priest and the Press: Topoi of Faith in International News* focuses on the communication taxonomy of religion news. To accomplish this, the candidate presents a thematic analysis of press materials of diverse genres and carefully outlines their common topical profiles:

politics, the religious “other”, “big questions” of faith. Based on this, the candidate justifies his main conclusion: high-quality religion media content is able to defeat populist abuses of religion – and to contribute to the overall health of local media ecosystems.

In his John Milton, *Of Education, Areopagitica*, the candidate presents an in-depth study and a Bulgarian translation of the primary texts supplemented by parallel commentary, in which he outlines the meaning and value of Milton’s treatises, uncovers their historical context and specifics, analyses and studies in detail their content and polemic weight. In view of its research span and depth, the book is a genuine academic opus bringing out the historical horizon as well as the new perspectives in the field of academic education in general and the humanities in particular.

Shelters of Faith: The Church and the Council in the Writings of Marsilius of Padua and William of Ockham is a comprehensive study of the ecclesiological views of two major medieval thinkers. Here, the candidate contextualises these views and the controversies which they incited. In appendix, the book also offers three key primary source texts in Bulgarian translation and hence stands as an exemplar opus in the field of history of political thought.

The in-depth study “Rise and Development of the Concept of Media Literacy” (co-authored with Assoc. Prof. Svetla Tsankova) looks into the history of the concept of media literacy in the larger context of media history and justifies a shift in the concept’s temporal span.

In “Freedom, Conscience, Academia: Speaking in Public and Protecting the “Good Name” of Universities”, the candidate discusses the limits of the university freedom of expression in view of the conditions posed by Bulgarian legislation (the Law for the Development of Academic Staff and the Labour Code of the Republic of Bulgaria), as well as in view of the span of academic autonomy as defined in the Constitution and the history of the idea of academic freedom. Based on this, he suggests the explicit inclusion of a “third” freedom of academic civic expression (along with the academic freedom of teaching and that of research) in Bulgarian legislation.

In his “Freedom of Speech and Its Christian “Prison”, the candidate presents and analyses key moments of the history of the freedom of expression. In “Ancilla mercatus laboris”, he examines some of the challenges arising out of the current trend of reducing education to an *ancilla*, “servant”, of labour markets and brings forth the need of reconsidering this reductionism in teaching and research in the field of the social sciences and humanities. The rest of the candidate’s publications study other aspects of the history and development of the humanities and introduce the academic biography of a seminal contemporary thinker, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and that of Prof. Kalin Yanakiev, an established Bulgarian scholar and longstanding member of the Department of History and Theory of Culture at the University of Sofia.

4. Academic contributions of the candidate

Martin Ossikovski's contributions reach out to several fields: media and communication culture, communication and research culture in the field of SSH, history of political thought, translations of classic and contemporary thinkers.

As regards media and communication culture research, the candidate is the local pioneer in taxonomy analysis of global religion news. Also, he is the first one in the country to take on the history of the genesis of the idea of press freedom based on the works of John Milton and a wide circle of additional relevant historical sources.

As regards research and communication culture in the field of SSH, the candidate is the first to survey and study the attitudes of local academic communities regarding this topic in general. Also, he is the initiator and co-organiser of a national roundtable resulting in the completion of a list of specific suggestions aimed at the differentiation of research evaluation criteria relevant applicable to natural and engineering sciences, on the one hand, and the social sciences and humanities, on the other. These suggestions were apparently considered in later changes of the respective legislative acts, and there are reasons to believe that criteria differentiation will grow deeper in the future. As well, the candidate has authored a methodology for comparative mapping of national research evaluation mechanisms in different European countries.

The two fields above are of direct relevance to the current call for applications. Here, the candidate is among the leading researchers in Bulgaria, his contributions are of conclusive value, his initiatives evolve within ambitious international projects and have the potential to nourish public debates as well as to lead to desirable changes in legislation related to regulation, funding, and research output evaluation in the SSH.

The candidate's other contributions fall within the fields of the history of political thought and are complemented by his work as a translator and volume editor. His citations and presence at major international fora testify well to their value.

In sum, Martin Ossikovski's research activities span over new, promising, and potential-rich thematic domains, such as media and communication history and culture and research and communication culture with an emphasis on SSH. His research achievements open new perspectives, but also stimulate other colleagues in their work. The candidate has mastered the ability to form and manage research teams, is well known both in the country and abroad, remains a cherished university teacher and tutor whose study offers invariably attract student attention. His academic teaching skills are in tune with today's global academic criteria and will certainly

contribute to improving Bulgaria's higher education in the field of the social sciences and humanities.

5. Conclusion

The documents and materials submitted by Martin Nikolaev Ossikovski for the present call are in full agreement with the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff, its Implementation Guide, and the Regulations of the University of Sofia.

The candidate has presented a sufficient number of post-doctorate publications. Their contributions are both of theoretical and applied practical value, and a substantial part of them directly corresponds to the thematic focus of the present call for applications. The academic and teaching qualifications of Martin Ossikovski are beyond doubt. His achievements in this regard fully cover the respective minimum national requirements and University of Sofia's additional requirements.

In summary, the candidate's experience testifies to his erudition, the breadth of his research horizon, and openness to academic innovation. We are presented with the application of one of our notable specialists in the spheres of media history and culture, academic research and communication culture, and history of political ideas.

Following the review of the materials submitted in response to the current call for applications and their contributions, I find it thoroughly justified to support the candidate's application and to recommend to the Academic Jury to return to the Faculty Council a commendation report supporting the election of Martin Nikolaev Ossikovski as Associate Professor in Sociology, Anthropology, and Culture Sciences (Research and Communication Culture in the Social Sciences and Humanities) for the needs of Sofia University.

23 October 2022

Reviewer: Prof. D.Sc. Vladimir Gradev